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AUTHOR Herder, Dale M.; Standridge, Larry A.
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ABSTRACT

Educational programs in learning centers away from a central campus can tap a largely forgotten "market" of community college students, especially in times of higher energy costs when many suburban or rural adults may not wish to drive to a central campus. However, in order for these programs to be effective, sound management is essential. An analysis of Lansing Community College's Continuing Education program reveals six elements that are vital to its success: (1) the institutional organizational chart locates the Director of Continuing Education near the central administrative structure to enhance his/her credibility and to allow for the effective coordination of departmental activities; (2) a formal contract delineates the roles and respective functions of the college and its local school district; (3) a consultant to the college president serves as an intermediary with the superintendents of local school districts; (4) scheduling based on student and community needs offers students a broad selection of courses and fosters growth in enrollment; (5) a philosophy of public relations based on communication seeks to alert community members to what is going to happen, inform them of when it is scheduled, and remind them that courses are about to begin; and (6) the same basic support services that are provided at the central campus are available for continuing education students. (Author/AYC)

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Blueprint for Excellence

Dale M. Herder, Ph.D.
Administrative Assistant to the President
Lansing Community College

Larry A. Standridge, Ph.D.
Director, Continuing Education
Lansing Community College

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Larry A. Standridge

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CONTINUING EDUCATION: Blueprint for Excellence

Dale M. Herder, Ph.D.
Administrative Assistant to the President
Lansing Community College

Larry A. Standridge, Ph.D.
Director, Continuing Education
Lansing Community College

INTRODUCTION:

Educational outreach from a central campus to geographically distant learning centers has become a subject of increased interest in recent years. As fiscal constraints become greater, as gasoline prices soar, and as reduced birth rates begin to impact colleges, the need has become increasingly apparent to seek out and recruit students from new "markets". At Lansing Community College (Lansing, Michigan) the Continuing Education Office has experienced over a 100% increase in off-campus student enrollment since 1977 without compromising educational excellence in course offerings. This enrollment accounted for 5% of total institutional credit production in the 1979-80 academic year.

Lansing Community College opened its doors in 1957 to 224 students and seven faculty and staff members. Since then, it has grown steadily to accommodate approximately 21,000 students with a full-time faculty and staff of nearly 500.

Lansing Community College is one of Michigan's most diversified community colleges. Over 300 programs are offered to satisfy students of all ages and categories. These programs include such areas as art, business, associate degree transfer, technical trades, aviation and seminars. The Continuing Education office provides service to locations as far as 40 miles from the urban campus in the central lower peninsula of Michigan.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

At Lansing Community College, the Continuing Education Office is a part of the Central Administration. The Director of Continuing Education reports to the Adminis-

trative Assistant to the President, and is charged with several responsibilities:

1. Establishment and maintenance of communication with thirty school districts within the college's service area. These districts provide space and partial supervision of the college's learning centers. (The college does not use the term "extension center" in order to avoid any implication that off-campus learning centers are in any way secondary to the college's basic mission.) The working relationship between the college and various school districts is defined in a written contract between the two agencies.
2. Assisting the College's departments in the scheduling of classes in the learning centers.
3. Coordination of publicity for the programs in the learning centers.
4. Providing for or cooperating in making registration services available for each of the learning centers.
5. Supporting the instructional activities in the learning centers by providing courier service for audio-visual materials, student evaluation forms, textbooks, and other items.
6. Maintaining continuous positive relationships with learning center directors.

Responsibility for instructional quality is assigned to each of the College's five academic divisions. Routine courses, short courses, workshops, seminars and related support service functions are assigned to the College's various divisions. The hiring, assignment, supervision and evaluation of all instructors are likewise divisional and departmental responsibilities.

The Continuing Education Office serves as a bridge or communication link; it is the primary coordinating agency between divisions/departments of the College and

college-level community education programs in its 30 school districts. It should be emphasized that the major purpose of the Continuing Education Office is that of broker in the educational marketing process. Although a trouble-shooter and facilitator on behalf of quality, the Continuing Education Office is free of duties involving the administration of instruction and thus can spend time on brokering.

There are a number of specific benefits resulting from this organizational structure. All classes, workshops, seminars and short courses share the same high quality regardless of their location or time offered. The same course content is offered by the departments with the same instructors whether on the central campus or in a learning center 40 miles away. Every effort is made to provide the same instructional and support services. The counterproductive "I/They" syndrome between academic units and "extension people" in continuing education programs is thus practically eliminated at Lansing Community College.

CONTRACT

The written contract between the College and its learning centers (normally signed by a local school district superintendent) is an important key in establishing and maintaining clear, formal and cooperative relationships between the College and its educational partners.

The contract used by Lansing Community College states that the College is responsible for:

1. Payment of salaries of faculty for conducting College credit courses scheduled and competently taught in the local school district facilities.
2. Providing calendar/schedule listing all registration activities.
3. Providing purchase orders to cover the cost of advertising in each school district, the financial limits of which serve as a budget for the advertising of the program in each local community.

4. Providing forms, materials, and information needed by the school districts.
5. Scheduling in-service training for designated school district personnel regarding college forms, procedures and student policies at the College in routinely scheduled meetings and on an "as needed" basis.
6. Scheduling registration assistance upon request from the school district.
7. Coordinating academic advising service in the school district building at least one evening during each term.
8. Providing student identification pictures/cards.

The School District, according to the contract, is responsible for:

1. Designating a person as liaison between the school district and the Continuing Education Office at the college.
2. Assisting in the development of the calendar of activities and schedule of classes for the learning centers.
3. Assisting in the advertising of College courses within the local area.
4. Disseminating forms and information to college students and potential students.
5. Registering students prior to the first meeting of classes and assisting with registration at the first meeting of the class.
6. Providing adequately heated, lighted, and equipped classroom facilities and instructional equipment.
7. Providing adequate information so the instructor can function effectively within the teaching environment. Such information may include location of classrooms, restroom facilities, student coffee areas, smoking areas, and parking.

The College's compensation to the School District is stated in the contract, and is based upon a formula combining the number of credits generated by the local learning

center and various services rendered by the local learning center. Types of services, and the percentage of compensation allowed for each are: room (50%), administrative support (10%), registration services (15%), instructional equipment (10%), and assistance in need analysis/scheduling (15%). Thus, a learning center that provides only rooms would receive only 50% of the agreed upon compensation rate for each credit hour generated. The addition of a single student in a class increases the compensation received by the local learning center, thus the compensation serves as an incentive for the School District to energetically recruit local students.

CONSULTANT

Significant to the relationship between the College and the local school districts is a consultant to the College President. This position is presently filled by a retired superintendent of public schools (40 years as a superintendent) who officially works two days a week (and unofficially seven days a week) for the College. He establishes and maintains continuous contact with superintendents in the College's service area, and spends his time listening and attempting to understand the concerns of the superintendents and their boards of education. This consultant role is important to the President and his staff because it supports anticipatory decision-making vis-a-vis the local school districts. The consultant is of value to the Continuing Education Office as a pulse-taker, trouble-shooter and office-mate/sounding board.

As problems relating to the College's program or the school districts' community education programs are identified by the consultant or Director of Continuing Education, various responses are made. In some instances the College invites the leadership of a successful, ongoing community education program to share insights and strategies at a luncheon with leaders in a school district where a program is struggling or just getting started. At other times, the College is instrumental in convincing the school leaders of a geographic area to share ideas about their common interests or how their

affiliation with the College can be beneficial to them and their constituents. And at other times superintendents and their boards are invited by the College to explore at a dinner meeting some of the issues impacting on their local area or on the entire state.

The role of the consultant complements the functions of the Director of Continuing Education. This two-pronged approach to the local learning center and its local superintendent provides the basis for a unique, cooperative and proactive relationship between the College and the school districts it serves.

SCHEDULING

As much as the above factors, scheduling is also a key component of Lansing Community College's blueprint for excellence. When the right low-cost courses are scheduled within the right distance for the right potential students, and when appropriate advertising and communication are accomplished, the result is a predictable success. The following are five principles used by Lansing Community College in scheduling classes in learning centers:

1. Classes are scheduled in learning centers in response to community needs. Needs are determined through surveys, advisory councils, individual student requests, faculty suggestions, department suggestions and suggestions or requests of businesses, industries, or community agencies. Suggestions and requests received from community education directors are usually given high priority by the college's academic departments.
2. Classes are scheduled in learning centers in cooperation with community education programs. This gives local identity to the classes. Duplication and competition between the College and community education programs is thus avoided.
3. Increasing the number of course offerings is a key to building the number of enrollments. While there is constant effort to increase the average

class size as a means of increasing enrollment, this alone is not enough. Additional classes must be scheduled in response to community needs.

4. Intentional overscheduling of classes is necessary. Records indicate that approximately one-third of the classes offered in learning centers (no matter how many are offered) will have to be cancelled due to low enrollment. However, class cancellation rate of more than 35% is considered excessive. A word of caution: Finding the right balance in deliberately overscheduling is not always easy.
5. Some classes are never scheduled in learning centers. Because classes in learning centers are expected to have the same content and quality of instruction as all other classes, courses requiring certain specialized equipment are not scheduled in learning centers. Also, classes which consistently receive low enrollments on the central campus are seldom offered in learning centers.

PROMOTION

"Communicate with the public three times" is a basic principle of promoting a community-based program. Alert the public to what is going to happen, inform them of when it is scheduled and then remind them that courses are about to begin. At least a half-dozen approaches are used by Lansing Community College is achieving a "three-time communication":

1. Classes and programs scheduled in the learning centers are listed in the College's master schedule of classes by course title and again in the back of the schedule book by off-campus location. The name of the community is in bold type; information about enrollment at the center and where to direct inquiries is listed along with the classes, number of credits, times of class meetings, starting dates, laboratory fees,

and instructors' names.

2. A Schedule Supplement is printed on newspaper stock for mailing to students who were enrolled in the centers during any term of the previous year. The supplement is developed using the same format that is used in the back of the master schedule book. Additional information about residency requirements, tuition and fees, advising services, financial aid, and the College calendar is included. During the fall term of each year, a picture of the school district building in which the college classes meet and a picture of the community education director and secretary are included in the master and supplemental schedules. The supplement is mailed four weeks before the beginning of each term to students living in the learning center area.
3. When all schedules are completed for the learning centers, a copy is sent to the college's Public Relations Office for the preparation of news releases on each of the learning center programs. A list of the daily and weekly newspapers is maintained for ease in determining the best medium for release of news articles.
4. A schedule and budget for display ads is developed each summer by the College's Continuing Education Director for the following year. The schedule indicates in which newspaper the display ads are to be placed, which community education directors will be responsible for placing the ads, and which learning centers will be featured in each ad. A purchase order is provided to local newspapers for use in billing the college. By working with the community education directors in the placement of advertising, more complete coverage of the service area is achieved. Local identity and rapport is also established with the newspaper editors.
5. Many of the school districts are willing to use their school newsletter

to list the local Lansing Community College schedule. This is especially true because the school district is involved in the "incentive compensation" system described earlier. School districts frequently list the schedule for an adjoining district when requested even though no compensation may be involved.

6. Because of the "incentive compensation" approach, many of the community education directors choose to send a letter or other special notices to community leaders, business owners or individuals in a position to disseminate information about college programs.

To supplement the above approaches and as an ongoing reminder of the College's programs in the various school district buildings, the College provides laminated signs to be placed in school district buildings. The signs state that, "as a service in this community, Lansing Community College offers college classes in this building in cooperation with (name of the school) and (place where further information is available)".

SUPPORT SERVICES

Implicit in the charge to Lansing Community College's Director of Continuing Education is the responsibility for assisting in the delivery of the same quality of instruction and services in the learning centers as is available on the central campus. To effectively extend the essential services of the College to over two thousand students in thirty different locations in a five-county area demands careful planning and an adequate allocation of institutional resources.

Administrative personnel of the College are assigned by their respective divisional deans to relate to the learning centers as a part of the College's ongoing interaction with the students, faculty, and staff. This involvement at the learning centers encourages the College's programs and, as an indirect benefit, provides the divisions/

departments of the College with direct suggestions from the learning centers.

At Lansing Community College the services to the learning center students and staff can be viewed in two ways. First are those specific services for which personnel are selected, employed (part-time), and trained to perform. Second are the services that can be considered "courier" in nature, involving the regular staff of the College.

Included in the services of the first category are registration, advising, financial aid assistance and the preparation of student identification cards. As many as twenty-five individuals are hired by the Continuing Education Office each term to assist with registration and related functions in the learning centers. These registration assistants are assigned four basic functions: completion and receipt of enrollment forms; delivering the completed enrollment forms to the College with cash and checks; meeting each class the first time to see that everyone is enrolled and that each class has enough enrollment to be held; and communicating enrollment counts each evening to the Continuing Education Office for relay to divisions/departments for their information the next morning. Each registration assistant is provided written detailed instructions for each of the above functions in a training session each term. A debriefing session for College administrators and registration assistants is scheduled after each registration period to identify problems and discuss ways in which services can be improved. Advising services for students in learning centers are scheduled each term by the Continuing Education Office in coordination with the local community education director and the College's Counseling Department.

During fall term each year, College personnel--trained in the preparation of student identification cards and the use of portable photographic equipment--are assigned to the larger centers to prepare student identification cards. The identification card provides access to the learning resources, student activities, athletic facilities and events. Once the student has an identification card, the card is updated from term to term by registration assistants in the learning centers.

The second area of services extended to the learning centers is "courier" in nature. The Office of Continuing Education has identified individuals working for the College who live in the various areas served by learning centers. These individuals are compensated for delivering and returning instructional materials, textbooks, student evaluation forms and other support equipment as needed. A mailbox for each of the learning centers is located in the Continuing Education Office. Materials sent by a department or division of the College to any specific learning center are picked up from this mail box by the courier. With this system the Continuing Education Office accomplishes delivery by the date requested.

SUMMARY

Educational programs of excellence in learning centers away from a central campus can tap a largely forgotten "market" for community colleges. This is especially true in this age of spiralling gasoline prices, when suburban or rural adults may not wish to drive to a central campus.

Six keys to success are suggested about Lansing Community College's Continuing Education program.

1. The institutional organizational chart should locate the Director of Continuing Education near the central administrative structure. This high-level position will enhance the credibility of the continuing education function and allow for effective coordination of departmental activities as needs are identified in local communities.
2. A formal contract should be executed between the college and the local school district to be served. Such a lawyer-approved agreement maintains clear and cooperative relationships. Compensation based upon the number of college credits generated provides incentive for the school district to serve as an educational partner and broker.

3. A consultant to the president of the college is of great assistance if he/she relates primarily to superintendents of local school districts. This contact provides information and relationships that foster effective anticipatory decision-making for both the college and local superintendents.
4. Proper scheduling has a major impact on class enrollments. Local community and student needs should dictate classes to be offered. Limited overscheduling allows students a broad selection of courses and fosters growth in enrollment.
5. Communicate with the public three times. Alert the public to what is going to happen, inform them of when it is scheduled and then remind them that courses are about to begin. In every community a variety of communication media and techniques are available.
6. Provide support services. These services should include the same basic services available at the central campus as well as any special services necessitated by distance to the learning centers.

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